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AUTHOR Osborne, Nancy Seale
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses access to special collections at the State University of New York at Oswego (SUNY Oswego) library. Topics addressed include the role of student interns in processing materials; outreach programs, including a planned workshop for fourth grade teachers; library instruction sessions that allow students to examine new acquisitions; and beneficial relationships with various college groups and individuals, including the alumni association, the college photographer, the art gallery, and faculty members. Numerous references are made throughout to what is characterized as a whimsical but substantive article, "An Archival Bestiary," by Trudy Huskamp Peterson (The American Archivist, v54 n2 Spring 1991). It is noted that the article includes a glossary of "archives animalia." (MES)

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ACCESS TO PENFIELD LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: EXTENDING THE 'ARCHIVAL BESTIARY' CONCEPT

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Nancy Seale Osborne
Penfield Library Special Collections
SUNY College at Oswego
Oswego, New York 13126

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ACCESS TO

PENFIELD LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS:

EXTENDING THE 'ARCHIVAL BESTIARY' CONCEPT

Don't let anyone ever tell you that archival literature is dull, boring, unenthusiastic. Trudy Huskamp Peterson, assistant archivist of the United States at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D. C., published "An Archival Bestiary" in *The American Archivist*, v. 54, no. 2, Spring 1991. Using Jim Harter's 1979 Dover Publications paperback, *Animals, 1419 Copyright-Free Illustrations of Mammals, Birds, Fish, Insects, etc.: A Pictorial Archive from Nineteenth-Century Sources*, she developed an immensely creative and mind-bending glossary of archives animalia. In her article, the archival term "document" was visually portrayed by a species of amoeba, splayed in vivid black and white, with varying spots of dove grey. The common document's habitat was determined to be worldwide, with migration throughout records and manuscripts. "Personal papers," depicted by a horrendously spikey amoeba, was evidenced in the bestiary lexicon to be "usually found in groups, and highly prized by curators and collectors." Two skeletal, wraithlike seahorse specimens, unnamed to date, were considered to be depictions of the archivist before and after certification.

The term from Ms. Peterson's glossary which has the most interest to us gathered here today, is that of "access." Its depiction in the pictorial archive was a most stupefying figure to me. A gigantic bottom-feeding fish with a cavernous mouth, open wide to receive less vigorous denizens of the deep, a huge glassy eye and an essentially flat, spiny, deformed body, "grovels along the (ocean's) bottom, slowly eating its way through whatever it happens to encounter." I guess I was stupefied primarily because I hadn't

thought about the way "access" eats into our archival time at Penfield Library Special Collections.

History Professor Judy Wellman and I serve as co-coordinators of Special Collections, an area of the library which meets many of the goals of President Weber's Five Year Plan, and is embedded into a fair number of aspects of the library and the college's mission statements. Yet we struggle to meet archival standards for service, security, and personnel in our two open research afternoons during the semester. Access to Special Collections at SUNY Oswego, instead of being like Trudy Peterson's bottomfeeder, is more like the beady-eyed, fin-footed Reinwardt's gliding frog (page 200 in the nineteenth-century pictorial archive of animals). On the days in which we serve students utilizing primary source material of one kind or another, access is provided by the swift-footed gliding method. Seldom do we have the cogitating, ruminating time for access depicted by the African antelopes, tora, bontebok, and blesbok (page 68 of the same source).

Access and processing go hand-in-hand at Penfield Library. Student interns, bless them, who originate as history majors, museum studies minors, or, in rare instances, library school aspirants, fit into the archival bestiary lexicon as varying hares (page 90): ears straight up for information and direction in preparing inventories, describing collections, and identifying photographs, or, in some instances, as Senegal coucals (page 143) an aviarian species which devours all of the readings assigned for the week, proceeding to ask excellent and impossible-to-answer questions about procedures, processes and policies. If it were not for these interns over the semesters and the years, we would not be providing nearly as much access as we are able, because large amounts of material would simply not be processed. A number of these interns have gone on to graduate work in museum studies, history, and librarianship,

with specialties in archives and manuscript management.

I understand one of the reasons Geoff wanted me to be on this panel was because he had the idea that we do some creative outreach from SUNY Oswego's Special Collections. Unable to tear myself away from the archival bestiary theme, I debated about which creature from Jim Harter's animal "copyright-free illustration" source best described the concept of "outreach." Was it the eagle (page 99), talons stretched to their limit and filled with a strikingly shocked-looking reptile? Or might "outreach" be connoted by the "flying dog" fruit bat, wings spread, and legs akimbo (page 96)?

Outreach is both a boon and a blessing for us at Penfield. As I develop a workshop for fourth grade teachers to be held the two days after public school lets out this June, I know the Penfield access eagles and bats will be challenged this summer. Teachers with delight in their eyes and primary source materials in their minds will want to access Special Collections materials, at the same time as do visiting genealogists, researchers of normal schools from Japan, medical researchers from the Smithsonian... and we're not even open in the summer, except by appointment. To be perfectly honest, we are not in an institution which is willing to make the commitment that is required for us to meet many archival standards, including those involved with access. A $4,000 grant will allow environmental specialists to assess the environment occupied by Special Collections this fall; a subsequent implementation grant will be written. I believe that the presence of Garrison and Lull, well-known and respected environmental specialists, on our campus, will "lay down the gauntlet" about whether Special Collections is valuable to SUNY Oswego or not. I look forward to their visit with eagerness.

It is frequently possible to introduce previously naive, and unsuspecting,

researchers to artifacts, manuscripts and photographs, by structuring library sessions examining selected new acquisitions. Neophyte researchers are much like the falcon or buzzard (page 101): initially wary, but ecstatic at the suggestion of an intriguing morsel. The one-credit, quarter-course, Library Research Techniques class which I teach, always has a session in Special Collections. A recent acquisition, a small collection from a 1917 graduate of Oswego, containing beanies, dance programs, class notebooks, photographs of women involved in sports, newspaper clippings, and a notebook full of hilarious descriptions of professors, was made available to this class. Working in teams of two, students, looking much like turkey vultures, were asked to examine one item, put it into an educational framework, enumerate some of the things going on in the world at that time, and describe the item, using some archival terms, which were displayed on an overhead projector (with definitions). First, they were being given access at an unusual time for researchers--before the materials had been processed; second, their notes were retained by us to show to our student archival intern, who would begin providing access to the collection by processing the collection; and third, these undergraduate students in the library research strategy course were introduced to a valuable, unique area of the library which they might never have discovered.

One aspect of SUNY Oswego's Special Collections that "keeps us going" is our outstanding relationship with the Alumni Association, with Jim Ford, the college photographer, with Tyler Art Gallery, and with a wide variety of supportive faculty colleagues. Intensive work over several years with a Chinese chemist, sent to us by one of our Distinguished Teaching Professors, led to our being thanked in his treatise on normal schools. When museum studies students engaged in the huge project of cleaning and restoring four of the college's historic bronze plaques, we were able to work with them to research

and write the dedication ceremony that made those plaques a significant part of the college community, instead of being stored away in warehouses. A number of master's theses, especially in the history of technology curriculum area, have been completed, thanks to good relationships between a number of departments on campus and Special Collections.

This is not at all the paper that I set out to deliver at SUNYLA 1992. I initially did all of the appropriate things: reviewing the literature, devouring articles about access, talking to colleagues... In the end, I gave you but a few fleeting glimpses of the archival bestiary contained within SUNY Oswego's Special Collections. I suggest that you read Trudy's article, that you order the copyright-free animal book from Dover (it costs less than ten dollars), and that you choose the animal which best describes your institution's archival access circumstance. Perhaps it will be the fringed or flying gecko (page 173), the short-toed eagle (page 105), or the hamadryas baboon (page 7). Whatever animal you choose to describe your access circumstance, you can be sure that it has four things, as Trudy suggests in her article: distinguishing characteristics, European relatives, a unique habitat, and innumerable mutants.

Sources:

Harter, Jim. *Animals, 1419 Copyright-Free Illustrations of Mammals, Birds, Fish, Insects, etc.: A Pictorial Archive from Nineteenth-Century Sources.* New York: Dover Publications, 1979.

Peterson, Trudy Huskamp. "An Archival Bestiary." *The American Archivist, 54.2, Spring 1991, 192-205.*